

GOVERNMENT FOR THE PEOPLE

Should Liquor Talk?
By DR. HENRY GEORGE III
Part 5

14 JAN 1945

The purpose of a commission is usually to facilitate the public's enjoyment or protection in a more expeditious manner than could otherwise be realized. Thus our Delaware Liquor Commission was created with the idea of serving the public in the demand and control of alcoholic beverages. It was to help and guide business, it was the tail on the dog. Now, with the liquor business growing and the franchise of a license a coveted award, it is only inevitable that liquor should enter politics and that from an inconsequential tail that was used as a balance and guide the Liquor Commission tail could conceivably become the tail that wags the dog.

If persons, interested in converting the Independent retail liquor stores into state stores, succeed in getting their bills through the General Assembly we will find the Liquor Commission which now and heretofore has been dedicated to helping the public and the liquor business will actually be the liquor business itself with approximately five hundred political plums with which to reward the faithful. And who would not be faithful for the promise of a store that might pay a salary of several thousand dollars annually?

It is only on hearsay but I have been told by a number of seriousminded persons that our first liquor commissioner was opposed to the State store idea because he felt that liquor would talk; that it would become an instrument whereby the party that was in control could maintain itself, irrespective of the public will.

Whether or not this be true I heartily subscribe to such an attitude, and recommend that it continue.

In a series of 18 articles appearing in this column last year entitled "Can We Save Capitalism?" I endeavored to discuss the menace in Socialism, or State business in the private business fields. For those interested in the socialistic implications of the "State store" I refer them to this series. But while there is an inescapable precedent by the State store, which may just as readily be spread from liquor to gasoline stations or other essential businesses, the menace which we face at present is the very real potential of increasing the liquor interest in politics.

It has been well accepted by many thinking men that the Republican party, while openly disavowing any contact or interest in legislating the "State store" has already been prepared as to how to vote, and who are to sponsor a bill covering approximately 40 pages. If such be true we will see when the votes are cast that the first inroad of liquor into politics has begun. It is most unfortunate that an important business like the liquor industry must be politically kept under blankets. It means that in order to secure votes for their liquor stores that interested parties will be prepared to bargain in order to secure sufficient votes to win. And what will they bargain with? Perhaps even family court legislation or child welfare legislation.

If we do get the "State stores" many private business men will be given the choice of selling out their stock and trade to the State, which through its commission will appoint the faithful to the newly-acquired locations, or of staying on under State management provided they agree to vote right or have voted right in the past. In either event the political party in power will have some five hundred more enthusiastic members, who in order to keep their franchise must

deliver the vote on election and must see that the wishes of the bosses are carried out.

From the standpoint of population and size Delaware is the perfect State in which to study a sociological change. While it is not a happy thought it will be of interest to see how much further the people will be separated from the control of their government if they allow liquor to enter politics.

Already there are enormous interests that carefully scan each bill, and scrutinize back to diaper days each prospective candidate for public office. With liquor in the saddle of political patronage, how much more difficult will it be for progressive legislation ever to break the inertia of reactionary elements?

If there are any real prohibitionists and temperance groups I urge them to join those of us who believe in freedom of choice as to drink, for while they are opposed to drink and its abuses, the ruin of the individual is not so much to be feared as the debauchery of the government, which is an inevitable sequence to State stores.

If they support the State stores idea on the ground that once the State takes over they will be able to legislate less drink, they err in their judgment, for the State seldom legislates itself out of revenue, and they will be opposed by a small army of State agents who see in such legislation a danger to themselves and who will fight to preserve their jobs.

Education, the only weapon with which civilized man may cope with intemperance, will be less active to criticize a sister State organization that may contribute to its revenues.

Thus the cause of temperance, and the goal of the prohibitionist will recede while liquor counts the ballots and chooses the legislature, and the public will be led around by the political whisky ring like the great dumb bull that has the power but not the wit to free itself from the keeper who pulls him by the ring in his nose.